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[Home](#) / [News](#)

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TOP STORY

Weight lifters test strength at Bowling Green Strongman competition

By JACKSON FRENCH jfrench@bgdailynews.com Jan 6, 2018





In trials that contestants said put their mental and physical strength to the test, several dozen muscular men and women flipped monster truck tires, pulled trucks and lifted and walked with a range of objects weighing hundreds of pounds.

The Iron Warrior SoKY Strongman competition, held Saturday at Western Kentucky University's L.D. Brown Ag Expo Center, drew roughly 60 competitors from numerous states and pitted them against each other in five official Strongman challenges. The Hercules Hold, a test of grip strength, and mas wrestling, a Russian sport where two opponents grip a wooden stick and try to wrench it from each other's grip, were also offered.

Tyler Young, a competitor in the middleweight class and a coach at BG Powerhouse, where he trains other Strongman enthusiasts, has been interested in the World's Strongest Man competition since he was a child and only got involved in Strongman contests three years ago after learning there was a weight class for people his size.

"I grew up watching World's Strongest Man when I was little and I saw these giants doing all this crazy stuff and I always wanted to do it but obviously I'm a little shorter and obviously I don't have the stature for that," he said. "I didn't know there were weight classes in Strongman and as soon as I found out, I found somebody in the area that started doing it (with me)."

Strongman competitions aren't simply about seeing how much someone can lift, Young said, adding that each competition is also a struggle to figure out how to lift unusually shaped objects, like giant balls of concrete and Mouser blocks, brick-shaped chunks of metal with smooth surfaces and no handles.

“You have to be a tactician,” he said. “You can’t just go out and just ‘grrrr’ through it and hope to get it because you have to figure out the way your body’s going to cooperate,” he said.

“Strongman has found a way to quantify moving odd stuff. You may have somebody that can bench press 400 pounds but they struggle to move a couch.”

The tendency for Strongman contests to focus on a range of unusual feats of strength that vary from one competition to the next makes settling on a consistent routine impossible, according to Young, who has participated in more than a dozen competitions since he took up the sport three years ago.

“You have to be adaptive more than anything else,” he said.

One of Young’s students, Heather Phelps of Bowling Green, participated in her first Strongman show Saturday. During an event referred to as the Medley, which tasked competitors with lifting four separate objects that varied in weight and the ways in which they can be held, Phelps was unable to complete the challenge within the 75-second time limit, though she was able to fully lift the 140-pound Mouser block over her head, which she noted was a feat many others she competed against weren’t able to do.

“That’s the first time I ever touched that block so I’m really proud I got it up, she said.”

Overall, Phelps said, she was satisfied with how she performed in the medley, adding that the 175-pound Viking Press, the final part of the medley, has been difficult for her while practicing at BG Powerhouse.



“I was really happy with it,” she said. “I didn’t actually get the Viking Press up but I’ve only gotten it up in my home gym once.”

Phelps has been involved with Strongman training for five months, she said, adding that Young recommended the sport to her.

While male competitors far outnumbered the female contestants, Phelps said the sport hasn’t been intimidating or alienating for her.

“At my home gym, there are eight people who train Strongman. I’m the only female who’s there every week,” she said. “It’s always been a really welcoming environment. The guys don’t treat me differently because I’m a female. They’re happy to make adjustments to their workouts if what they’re doing’s too heavy.”

Phelps said she enjoys the competitive nature of the sport and the range of lifting exercises it incorporates. “It’s kind of different than traditional weightlifting. A lot more interesting events, interesting weights,” she said.

The strangeness of the weights sets Strongman events apart from other competitions that involve weightlifting and keeps the sport interesting, she said.

“Theres a lot of technique,” she said. “You can’t just come in and, if you’re really really strong, expect to be able to move the implements. There’s a lot of, you know, you need to know where to grab, how to grab.”

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